

Firearm Deaths Grow, Disparities Widen

Comprehensive Strategies Can Prevent Violence and Help Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities

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35%

Between 2019 and 2020, the firearm homicide rate increased about 35% and the firearm suicide rate remained high.

39%

The largest increase in firearm homicides was among Black people (39%). The largest increase in firearm suicides was among American Indian and Alaska Native people (42%).

Nearly 5x

In 2020, counties with the highest poverty level had firearm homicide rates 4.5 times as high and firearm suicide rates 1.3 times as high as counties with the lowest poverty level.

Overview

Firearm deaths continue to be a significant and growing public health problem in the United States. In 2020, 79% of all homicides and 53% of all suicides involved firearms. From 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate increased about 35%, and the firearm suicide rate stayed high. The firearm homicide rate in 2020 was the highest recorded in over 25 years.

Long-standing systemic inequities and structural racism limit economic and education opportunities. They contribute to unfair and avoidable health disparities among some racial and ethnic groups. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the substantial increase in the firearm homicide rate, along with notable increases in firearm suicide rates for some groups, has widened racial, ethnic, and other disparities. For example, young people, males, and Black people have the highest firearm homicide rates and experienced the largest increases in 2020. The reasons for the increasing rates and widening disparities are likely complex. Multiple stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the increases, including:

- Changes and disruptions to services and education
- Mental stress
- Social isolation
- Economic stressors, including job loss, housing instability, and difficulty covering daily expenses

Stopping firearm violence now and in the future requires a comprehensive prevention approach focused on reducing inequities. Strategies should address the underlying physical, social, economic, and structural conditions known to increase firearm homicide and suicide risks. Some prevention strategies will be more immediate, and others will have more long-term effects.

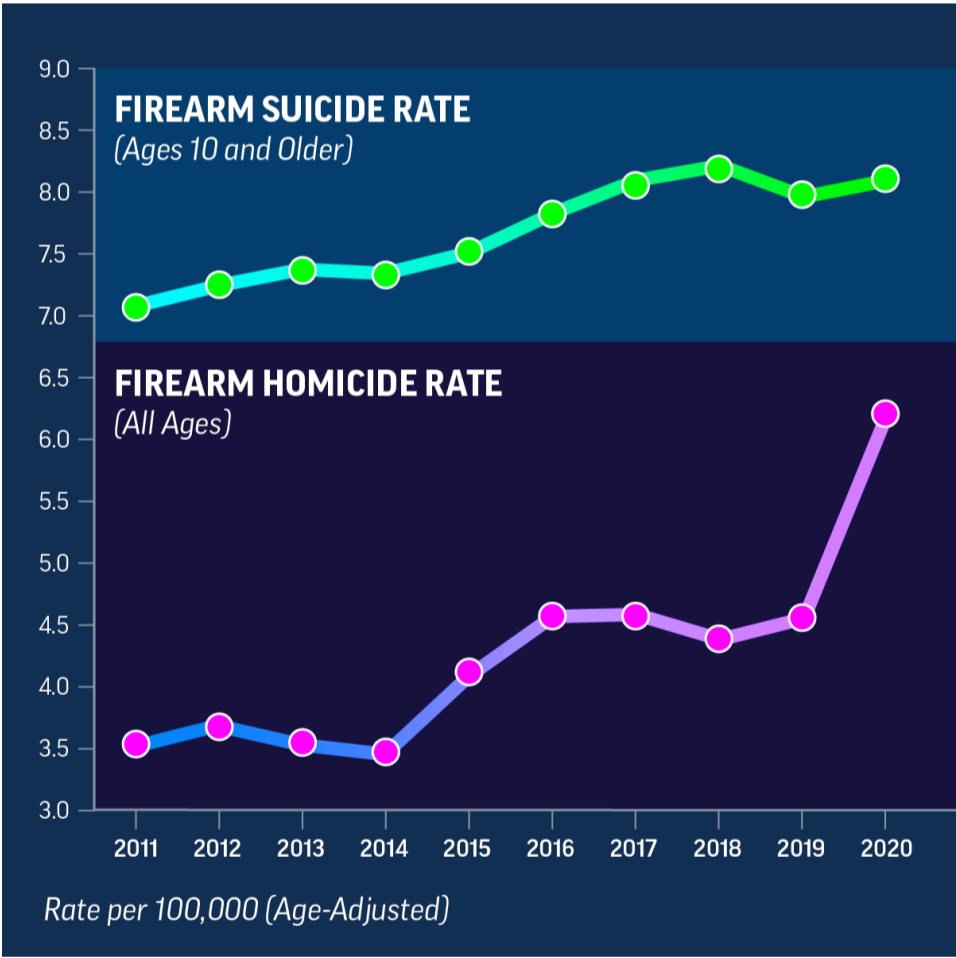
[Read the full *MMWR*](#) [ASL video on firearm deaths](#)

Challenges

- **Ripple effects:** Firearm homicide and suicide can have a ripple effect in communities—reaching beyond the people immediately impacted by the deaths and affecting friends, families, and coworkers.
- **High risk for death:** Firearms can lead to deadly injuries and are often used in homicides and suicides.
- **Growing racial and ethnic gaps:** The COVID-19 pandemic may have worsened existing social and economic stressors that increase the risk for firearm homicide and suicide, particularly among racial/ethnic minority communities.
- **Poverty effects:** Counties with higher poverty rates had higher firearm homicide rates. People living in these areas experienced higher increases than those living in counties with the lowest poverty rates. Higher county poverty levels were also associated with higher firearm suicide rates.
- **Multiple stressors:** Multiple factors, including social, economic, and physical conditions in communities, contribute to firearm homicide and suicide risk, as well as racial and ethnic inequities.
- **Preventive actions urgently needed:** The increases in firearm deaths and widening disparities have heightened the need for comprehensive preventive actions. Programs, policies, and practices can have immediate and lasting benefits.

Firearm Homicides Rose Sharply, and Firearm Suicides Remained High

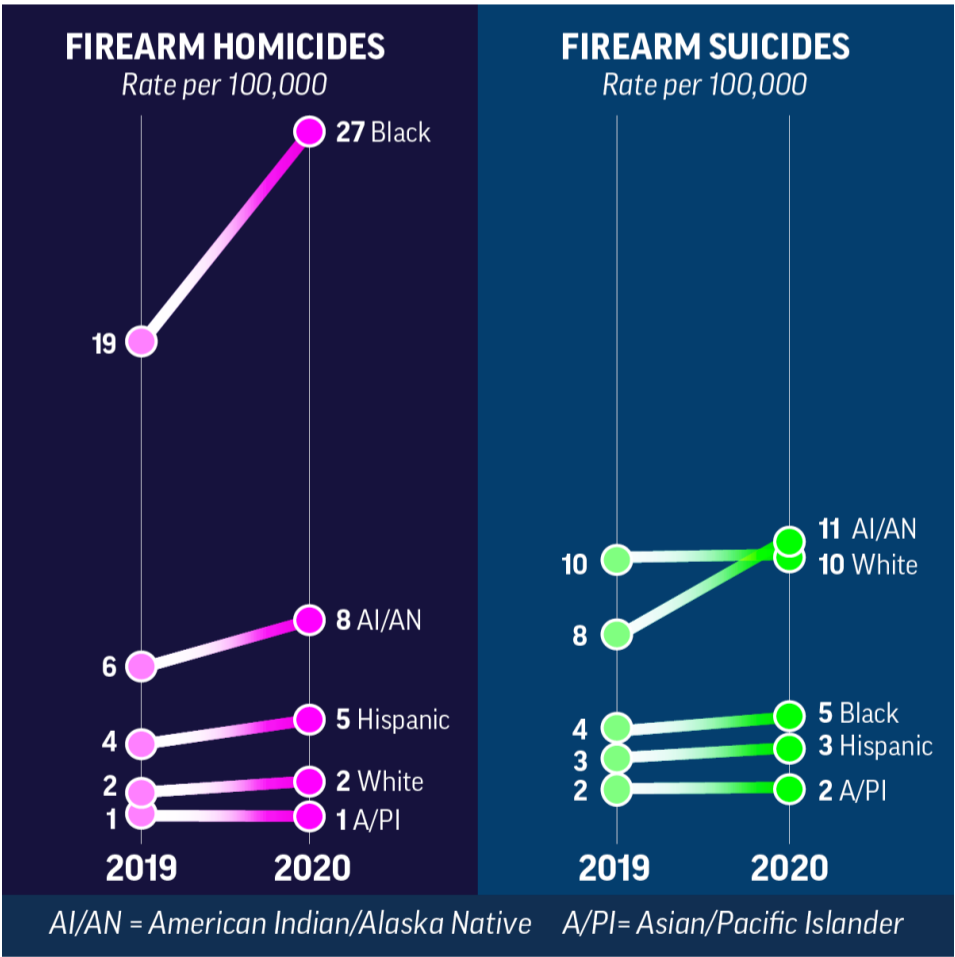
From 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate increased about 35%, while the firearm suicide rate remained high.



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Firearm Homicides and Suicides Increased for Some Racial/Ethnic Groups

The firearm homicide rate increased most for Black people, and the suicide rate increased most for American Indian/Alaska Native people.



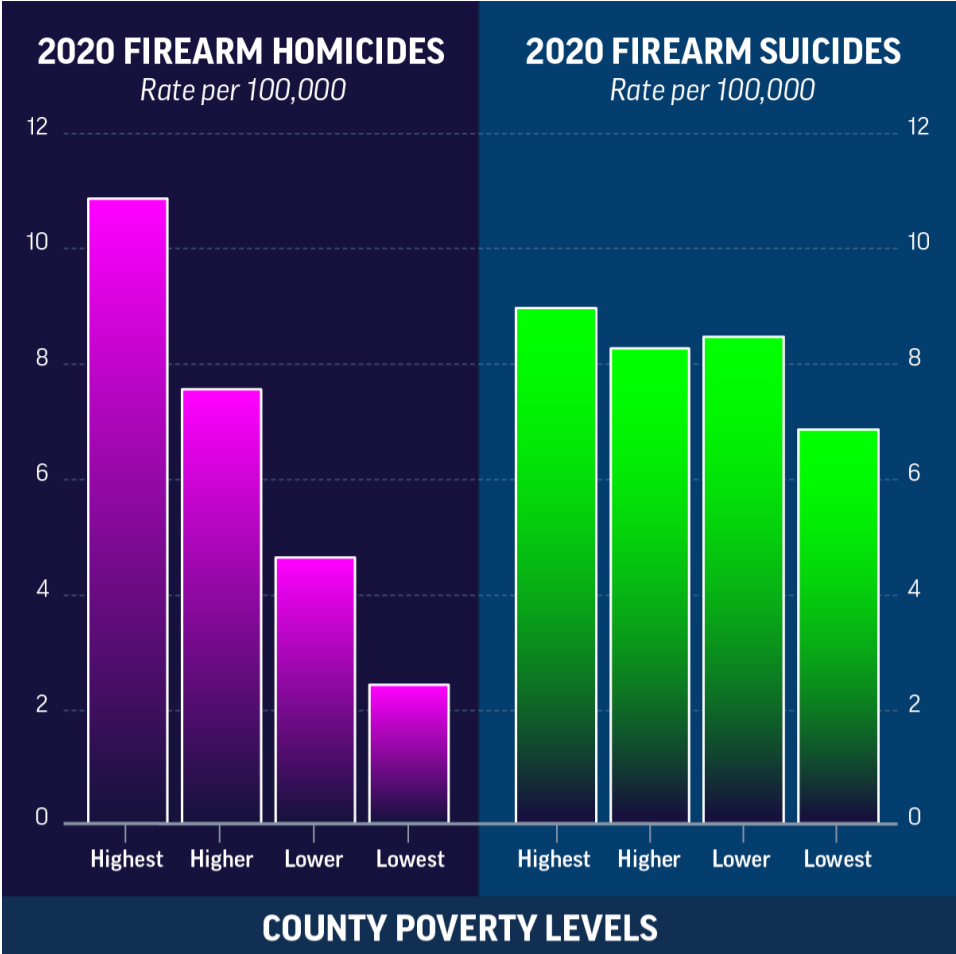
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Conditions of Poverty Are Associated with Firearm Deaths

In 2020, counties with the highest poverty level had firearm homicide rates 4.5 times as high and firearm suicide rates 1.3 times as high as counties with the lowest poverty level.

Comprehensive Actions with Approaches that Work

Strategies are needed to address physical, social, economic, and structural conditions known to increase firearm homicide and suicide risks.



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What Can Be Done

To Achieve Health Equity

Preventing firearm deaths requires a comprehensive approach and various partners from across sectors working directly with communities to decrease inequities and increase resiliency and well-being. Programs, policies, and practices can reduce inequities by focusing on the places and people experiencing the greatest burden of violence as well as the underlying conditions contributing to risk. Some actions can have a more immediate impact on preventing violence, and some can be long-term solutions. A few examples include:

- **Street outreach and hospital-based prevention programs** can ensure that people with the greatest needs are connected to services and work to reduce tensions and risk for violence.
- **Enhancing and maintaining green spaces**, like cleaning vacant lots and planting grass and trees in high-risk areas, can change the physical and social conditions that contribute to violence and inequities. Revitalized vacant lots in communities are associated with reduced firearm assaults, particularly in areas with the highest poverty.
- **Strengthening economic and household stability** through housing assistance, childcare subsidies, tax credits, and livable wages can help lift families out of poverty, reduce stress, and enhance positive outcomes for individuals and families.

A comprehensive approach includes engagement of policy makers; local, state, and tribal governments; health, education, justice, and social service agencies; businesses; and community organizations. Their involvement in selecting data-driven violence prevention programs and policies can ensure that local needs are met.



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Source: May 2022 Vital Signs






To Stop Violence Now and in the Future

Firearm deaths are preventable—not inevitable—and everyone has a role to play in prevention. Resources like [CDC's violence prevention technical packages](#) and [surveillance systems](#) can help leaders choose proven programs to make their communities healthier and safer.

Healthcare and Service Providers

- **Hospital-based programs** that intervene with victims of violence can prevent future violence, and interventions with those at risk for suicide can prevent future reattempts.
- Counseling and education paired with giving out a safety device, like a lockbox, are associated with safer firearm storage practices in the home.
- Community organizations, hospitals, and clinics can **expand access to social, emotional, physical, and mental health services and supports** to prevent substance use and suicide attempts and to address trauma associated with violence and prevent the continuation of violence.

Community Partners

- **Community and street outreach programs** like [CureViolence](#)  engage populations at higher risk for firearm violence and connect them with community services while reducing tensions that may lead to violence.
- Individuals, communities, and businesses can promote [safe firearm storage practices \[3 MB, 24 pages\]](#)   to reduce unauthorized use of a firearm.
- Many approaches, like **mentoring, supporting norms against intimate partner and other violence, teaching coping and problem-solving skills, and programs to prevent substance use**, have far-reaching benefits, including increasing well-being and reducing key risks for all types of violence.

Local and State Governments

- Communities and governments can **use data to select effective and sustainable programs and policies** to address the underlying conditions that contribute to violence inequities and enhance safe firearm practices.
- Policies to address **household and economic stability** can have a long-term impact by reducing family poverty and other risk factors for violence.

Footnotes and References



Related Pages and Resources

- [Vital Signs: Media Statement – Firearm Deaths Grow, Disparities Widen \[English\]](#)
- [Vital Signs: Media Statement – Aumentan las muertes por armas de fuego y se amplían las disparidades \[Spanish\]](#)
- [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report \(MMWR\): Vital Signs: Changes in Firearm Homicide and Suicide Rates — United States, 2019–2020](#)
- [Journal of the American Medical Association \(JAMA\): Firearm homicide and suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic: implications for clinicians and health care systems](#) 
- [CDC: Technical Packages for Violence Prevention](#)
- [CDC: Firearm Violence Prevention](#)
- [CDC: Suicide Prevention](#)
- [CDC: Injury Surveillance Systems](#)
- [CDC: Community Violence Prevention](#)
- [VA: Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Safe Firearm Storage](#)  [\[3 MB, 24 pages\]](#) 
- [NSSF: Project ChildSafe](#) 



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